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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed about 290 institutional members of either the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, or the American Association of State Colleges and Universities which are located in urban or metropolitan areas in order to gather data and to learn about their service areas, their commitment to community service, barriers to service, their methods to gain community institutional cooperation, and their professional association support needs. Respondents (N=186) indicated five areas of priority concern: (1) education, (2) economic development, (3) community development, (4) health and human services, and (5) cultural enrichment. Higher education, however, placed greater emphasis on the last two than did their communities. The study also found that lack of adequate resources and time for faculty to respond to societal needs were major barriers. Nearly 87 percent of respondents reported having one or more special purpose institutions, centers, or offices through which they delivered community service. Little or no direct coordination of individual activities was reported by the remaining institutions. Includes eight tables of data on criteria for community service, areas of concern, barriers to meeting community service mission, steps taken to increase effectiveness, types of current community service efforts, conditions for student and faculty participation, and service activity role in promotion, tenure, and related issues. (Contains 13 references.) (JB)

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Urban Community Service at AASCU and NASULGC Institutions: A Report on Conditions and Activities

According to Peggy Gordon Elliott (1994), president of the University of Akron (Ohio), "an unusually diverse mix of students is only one phenomenon that makes urban higher education distinct from traditional models. Major changes in society such as: a longer life–span, rapid technological development, intense global competition, shrinking resources, the passing of the machine age coupled with the birth of the information age, the demographic shift from rural to urban, all have major implications for the delivery of higher education within the context of a society that is centered in cities."

In 1993, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land–Grant Colleges (NASULGC) established an Office of Urban and Metropolitan Programs to assist members in their efforts to respond to their environments and to fulfill their missions. In Spring 1994, the associations conducted a survey of approximately 290 member institutions located in urban or metropolitan areas to:

- gather descriptive information about institutions and service areas;
- determine members' commitment to and involvement in community service;
- identify barriers that might hinder institutions' community service;
- identify methods used to engage university–community cooperation;
- assess members' needs in terms of useful support from the associations;
- develop data to guide AASCU/NASULGC and members' programming.

Findings

From the two associations, 186 members responded to the Survey of Community Service Activity. Of these, 107 are AASCU members, 50 are NASULGC members, and 29 hold dual membership in both associations.

Mission Statements

Approximately 12 percent of respondents reported their institutions have formal criteria governing the conditions under which the institution will undertake a community service project. Remaining respondents did not identify formal criteria in the mission or institutional bylaws but generally pointed to underlying principles consistent with the mission which guided decisions regarding community service activity.

Whatever the origin of the charge, the underlying principle is that service is related to learning. In the new vernacular, the expression "service–learning" is taking the place of community service. One institution reported, "the closest thing to a consensual criterion is to determine the educational value of the proposed service project for our students, faculty and staff." Institutions are sensitive to their responsibility to the student and incorporate this notion in their agreements with partner agencies.

Service Ethic

The 186 institutions reporting perceive that public urban–serving universities have a responsibility to render useful and dedicated service for the welfare of their community, state and nation. All are involved in activities related to the public service needs of their primary communities—one quarter occasionally and three–quarters systematically—through formal efforts.

Service Areas. Over half of the respondents report they envision a particular region of the state when they consider community service activity. Thirty–nine percent see their service area as the local area around their institution. Institutions can and do serve both local and regional areas at the same time and usually define these in terms of governmental divisions (city or county).

The size of "service areas" varies dramatically, from the 10,000 people living around the University of South Dakota to the 3,000,000 people of the Atlanta metro area (Kennesaw State College). For institutions located on or near international borders, service opportunities may extend beyond national boundaries. The University of Arizona reported its area to include Arizona and the Mexican State of Sonora. The University of Texas at El Paso reported serving farwest Texas, Northern Mexico, and Southern New Mexico.

Delivery Mechanisms. Nearly 87 percent of respondents report having one or more special purpose institutes, centers or offices through which they deliver community service while there is little or no direct coordination of individual activities at the remaining institutions. The net effect of these centers of activity combined with individual efforts is literally hundreds of collaborative efforts to improve educational opportunity, the social welfare of families and communities, and the quality of life of millions of people.

Identifying Priorities

The challenges facing communities may be similar and there are only slight differences in the service choices made by institutions and communities.

From communities' perspectives, the top three concerns were education, economic development and community development. Institutional needs analyses identified education, health/human services and cultural enrichment as priorities. All five of these are addressed within institutional community service activities.

In California, defense conversion and a consortium of universities responding to issues underlying the Los Angeles riots provide examples of the economic, education, laborforce, and social challenges being experienced by that state. The University of the District of Columbia reported efforts in education, infant mortality, public housing, and prevention of addiction, topics which are the focus of public attention in an urban center with many violence and drug–related problems.

Identifying Barriers

Institutions committed to public service have increased their efforts to meet their mission through community service. In confronting barriers to effectiveness, institutions are finding ways to make their involvement more productive.

Eighty–five percent of respondents consider current community service demands to be greater than five years ago. The structure and the cooperation necessary for collaboration with city officials, school officials, and business and industry are not barriers to performing such service, however. Neither is the commitment of university leaders or trustees. Respondents noted faculty support conditions as chief barriers to meeting community service missions. Forty–two percent and nearly 27 percent of respondents, respectively, noted that lack of adequate resources/time for faculty to respond to societal needs and lack of recognition of community service as a scholarly activity were significant barriers.

Institutions have capitalized on partnerships with community agencies, schools and business to leverage resources and expand service activities. They have also strengthened their infrastructures to make their involvement in community service more effective.

Range of Activity

Faculty and students in urban and metropolitan institutions are broadly engaged in issues of concern to their communities and are supported by their campuses in varying ways. Faculty consult with industry, state and local government, and human service agencies seeking to serve urban communities. Faculty and students conduct research on such issues as juvenile delinquency, drug and gang cultures, child welfare, urban education, high school drop–outs, youth violence, and homelessness.[1]

Long–term contributions of public, four–year urban and metropolitan institutions are likely to be significant in enhancing the relationship between universities and communities, in addressing challenges centered in cities, in reexamining assumptions about existing urban problems, and developing new collaborations to address them. The challenges facing urban centers will require that a range of activities and resources be mobilized to promote change.

More than 75 percent of institutions reported their faculty contribute intellectual resources to educational collaboration and economic development. Over 50 percent reported faculty provide health services or assistance to urban planners. Problems of the homeless are gaining the attention of the urban–serving public colleges and universities.

Administrators tend to be involved where faculty are, but in capacities which fit their roles: for example, they provide information to prospective students and make sure scholarships are available for those populations of students who need them the most. Administrators are also engaged in broad information outreach and cultural activities on behalf of their universities.

Students tend to be involved where faculty are, but a considerably smaller percentage of institutions report students' service in as many categories as faculty activity. Education and business collaborations offer the greatest opportunities, but assisting the homeless is also fairly widespread.

Student participation in community service is voluntary on most campuses. It is likely to be related to work required by a faculty member or by departmental policy. This is supported by other data from the survey. It is typical for schools of education or health to collaborate with elementary or secondary schools and/or groups of disadvantaged youth or adults within a community as a service project involving students and faculty.

The conditions under which faculty engage in service activity vary by institutional type.

Comprehensive public institutions appear more supportive of faculty service than are research universities. In tenure decisions, for example, 53 percent of comprehensive institutions consider service as compared to 40 percent of the research and doctoral respondents. In promotion cases, nearly 60 percent of comprehensive institutions consider service as compared to 42 percent of doctoral and

[1]A separate list of service activities reported by respondents is available upon request.

research universities. At comprehensive institutions, service seems to be regarded as a contribution to the mission of the institution which should be recognized in the faculty reward system.

The best indicator of faculty and student involvement in community service comes from the numerous examples of collaborations and projects that colleges and universities provided in response to the survey. Nearly 350 formal collaborations were listed, as were an equal number of efforts on campuses to relate scholarly activity (research or instruction) directly to community–identified needs. Much reported service activity falls in key categories: consultation with industry or with state and local government; collaboration with or aid to human service agencies; training for protective services (fire and police); drug or alcohol prevention; youth at–risk programs; violence prevention; systematic involvement in urban education; problems of the homeless; urban development; and environmental protection and preservation.

Future Directions

Respondents to the AASCU/NASULGC Survey of Community Service Activity identified priority needs in planning community service activities for their campuses. Seventy-four percent requested information on grants while 65.6 percent expressed interest in case examples of service activities, and 51.6 percent desired a directory of community service centers. Almost twenty percent of respondents requested problem-solving networks or workshops.

Many respondents suggested workshop topics and networking interests which should help in planning AASCU/NASULGC activities. The list is a good indicator of the key concerns of those involved in planning, organizing, delivering and evaluating community service activities.

Conclusion

The service community and the responding institutions each identified five areas of priority concern: education, economic development, community development, health/human services, and cultural enrichment. Higher education, however, placed greater emphasis on the latter two than did their communities. To promote continuing collaboration, institutions may find it useful to adjust their activities to align more closely with constitutents' priorities.

At the close of the twentieth century, public higher education is confronted with increasing societal expectations for community service. In urban and metropolitan areas, this means that universities will be expected to become even more actively involved in responding to the challenges and opportunities centered in the cities. To do so, urban–serving institutions may need to formalize their engagement via updated mission statements, revised operational criteria, and adjusted rewards systems that validate faculty service in this arena. It will be important to minimize internal barriers to involvement if higher education is to encourage student and faculty participation in community service and, thereby, meet societal expectations.

For further information
on survey results
or about the
AASCU/NASULGC
Joint Office on Urban
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Suggestions for Further Reading

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Table 1. Does your institution have formal criteria governing the conditions under which it will undertake a community service project?

		Percent of Responses by Association Membership Category		
	All Respondents	AASCU Members	Dual Members	NASULGC Members
No	88.4	91.4	75.9	89.6
Yes	11.6	8.7	24.1	10.4

Table 2. Which of the following areas of concern were initially identified by your service community (business leaders, school leaders, citizen action groups)? Which is your institution currently addressing with community service program activity? *

	Percent of Institutions with Service Activity	Issue Identified by Institution	Issue Identified by Community
Education	86.0	51.1	61.3
Economic development	76.3	35.5	60.8
Cultural enrichment	73.1	37.1	41.4
Health/human services	67.7	38.2	52.2
Community development	67.7	27.4	54.8
Environment	59.7	34.4	44.0
Labor force training	46.8	22.0	42.5
Employment	45.7	22.0	39.3
Government operation/decision making	44.6	21.0	35.5
Law enforcement	39.8	21.5	31.7
Conflict resolution	35.5	17.7	24.2
Housing	31.7	16.1	26.9
Energy	31.2	16.7	18.8
Transportation	25.3	14.5	25.8
Consumer affairs	21.0	9.7	14.5
Labor relations	20.4	10.8	14.5

Table 3. To what extent are the following conditions barriers to meeting the metropolitan/urban mission through community service activities? *

	Percent Where Condition Is Not a Barrier	Percent Where Condition Is Somewhat a Barrier	Percent Where Condition Is a Significant Barrier
Lack of cooperative relationship between university and school officials	89.8	10.2	0.0
Lack of cooperative relationship with business/industry	87.4	12.1	0.6
Lack of commitment of university leaders/trustees	83.0	15.2	1.8
Lack of cooperative relationship between university and city officials	82.3	17.2	0.6
Lack of student volunteers to participate in appropriate activities	54.2	40.5	5.4
Disagreement about priorities for service within the institution	47.6	47.6	4.9
Lack of organization within the institution of various community service activities	36.3	56.1	7.6
Lack of recognition of community service for faculty as a scholarly activity	28.6	44.6	26.8
Lack of resources/time for faculty to get involved to the extent necessary to solve problems	9.8	48.3	42.0

Table 4. What steps has your institution taken to make its involvement in community service activity more effective? *

	Percent of Institutions Having Taken Step
Greater emphasis placed upon community service in the mission of the institution	65.1
Greater commitment by top institutional leaders to community service activities	64.5
Clearer institutional goals for community service activities	55.9
Enhanced communications with service audience	52.7
Better information about the needs for community service programs in the institution's service area	43.6
Better allocation of resources for community service activities	32.3
Better integration of faculty professional service with institution's teaching/research functions	31.7
More effective incentive system to encourage faculty/staff commitment to community service	23.1

Table 5. In which kinds of community service activities are your faculty, students, or administrators currently engaged? *

	Percent of Respondents with Faculty, Students or Administrators Involved in This Activity		
	Faculty	Students	Administrators
A. Educational Service			
School/college collaboration	93.0	69.9	84.4
Providing technology and/or train use of technology	87.6	34.4	55.9
Collaborating on research with schools and school personnel	83.3	47.3	47.9
Training teachers for urban schools	82.8	40.3	37.6
Providing education/training to employees of community businesses	82.3	15.6	61.8
Submitting partnership grant proposals with schools	81.2	16.7	60.8
Conducting pre–college information programs for prospective students	67.7	54.3	85.5
Providing education/training to state or local governments	65.6	15.1	45.7
Opening library/cultural facilities to the community, allowing greater local access	50.0	23.7	71.5
Managing literacy initiatives for the adult community	48.9	32.8	32.8
Offering scholarships to recruit under–participating populations of students	39.8	18.8	76.9
Extending library privileges for school personnel	32.8	15.6	49.5
Jointly operating a public school or other similar facility	21.0	12.4	22.0
B. Information Analysis and Sharing			
Development of information resources for public officials or community organizations as needed	74.2	32.8	59.7
Ongoing economic monitoring analysis for the state or local government	62.4	17.2	36.6
C. Health Service Provision			
University health providers assisting community health care providers and facilities	55.4	37.1	39.3
University clinics/programs providing direct care	45.2	31.2	31.2
Other	9.1	8.1	6.5
D. Real Estate Management			
Management of low–cost housing developments	5.4	1.6	5.4
E. Infrastructure Development			
Technical assistance to urban planners	57.0	23.7	33.9
Student/faculty/volunteer assistance to build or repair homes	30.7	43.6	17.2
F. Economic Development			
Participation on business/industry advisory groups	79.6	19.4	68.8
Technical assistance to small businesses for technology, information, research needs	74.7	36.0	51.6
Special university/industry research activities	73.1	32.3	46.2
Cooperative education for student internships	72.6	73.1	55.9
Workforce development	62.4	16.1	45.2
Business/faculty exchange	50.5	9.7	27.4
G. Homelessness			
Volunteers for the homeless, for example, cooking and serving meals, working with children, etc.	38.2	59.7	30.1
Workforce training	37.1	14.0	21.0

Table 6. Under what conditions does student participation in service activities take place at your institution? *

	Percent of Respondents Selecting This Condition, By Association Membership Category			
	All Respondents	AASCU Members	Dual Members	NASULGC Members
Voluntary participation	85.5	86.0	86.2	84.0
Academic credit awarded for participation	53.2	57.0	48.3	48.0
Individual faculty members require	49.5	48.6	55.2	48.0
School/Department policy mandates	44.1	42.1	41.4	50.0
Community service grant supports	35.0	37.4	37.9	28.0
Institutional policy mandates/encourages	26.9	30.8	20.7	22.0
State law mandates	12.9	11.2	24.1	10.0
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table 7. Under what conditions do faculty at your institution participate in community service activities? *

	Percent of Respondents Selecting This Condition, By Association Membership Category			
	All Respondents	AASCU Members	Dual Members	NASULGC Members
Service considered in faculty rewards	61.3	65.4	58.6	54.0
Service viewed as scholarly activity	57.0	61.7	48.3	52.0
Discretionary funds available	39.3	38.3	48.3	36.0
Institution- supported release time available	37.1	38.3	37.9	34.0
Institution provides seed grants	31.7	27.1	41.4	36.0
Sabbatical leave available	30.7	32.7	17.2	34.0
Other	8.1	7.5	6.9	10.0

Table 8. Demonstrated productivity in the area of service is considered in faculty reward considerations for: *

	Percent of Respondents Selecting This Consideration, By Association Membership Category			
	All Respondents	AASCU Members	Dual Members	NASULGC Members
Promotion in rank	51.6	57.9	44.8	42.0
Granting of tenure	48.4	53.3	44.8	40.0
Salary increase	36.6	36.5	37.9	36.0
Recruitment	23.1	22.4	27.6	22.0

*For Tables 2-8, responses were not mutually exclusive, therefore percentages by column do not total 100.

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